

# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR VISIT WITH THE DOCTOR



*Continuum of Care*



## **When do you need to see the doctor?**

Sometimes you need to see the doctor because you are sick, or you just need a check-up. If you are sick, you may need to see the doctor that day or the next day. If you need a check-up, you will probably see the doctor within a few weeks.

You may need to see the doctor that same day or the next if you have:

- A fever of 101 degrees for more than three days
- A stomachache or other pain that keeps you from doing the things you usually do for more than two days
- A very bad bout of vomiting
- A change in your bathroom habits (for example, not having a bowel movement — a bm — or having a lot of loose bowel movements, or diarrhea) for more than a few days
- A bad cut that is very deep
- A sore that looks red and puffy and that feels hot and painful when you touch it
- Noticed that you feel very dizzy or sleepy all the time, and don't "feel like yourself"

- More seizures than usual or seizures that are different from usual
- A rash so bad that it causes a sore
- A very bad headache
- Problems catching your breath

Things like these often mean that you need to see the doctor right away.

You can probably wait a few weeks to see the doctor when you feel different from how you normally feel, but you are not sick, or in pain, and you can do the things you usually do. Some other things that might mean you may need to see a doctor at a later time are having mild headaches, stomachaches, or heartburn more often than usual, or having a change in your mood or your behavior that you do not understand.

If you are not sure whether you need to see the doctor right away or can wait a few weeks, then ask to speak to a nurse when you call the doctor's office to make an appointment. If you are in a residential program, please discuss this with your caregiver or support staff.



## Getting ready for the appointment

It is a good idea to list important things to tell the doctor. You can list these things in your Health Passport or even a notebook. You can make the list by writing it, or by telling it to someone else and asking them to write it for you, or by recording it. Tell exactly what you have been feeling, how often you feel it, and how long it has been going on. List what makes it feel better or worse and whether you have ever had this feeling before.

For example, if you have been waking up during the night because of heartburn, list it. Include such things as whether you get heartburn if you eat or don't eat close to bedtime. Also include when you first began waking up with heartburn, and how many nights a week it happens.

It is a good idea to mention everything you can think of, even if it does not seem important. Sometime little details can give the doctor clues to what is making you feel bad. Here are a few things that can give the doctor clues:

1. Have your bathroom habits changed lately?
2. Have your moods or energy levels changed?
3. Have you been sleeping more or less than usual? Do you have trouble getting to sleep? Do you wake up during the night and have trouble falling back to sleep? How often?
4. Do you have a medical condition that has changed?



1. Have you been eating more or less than usual?
2. Have you had other changes in your life or your daily activities?
3. Have you changed the medicine you take?

Bring these notes with you when you visit the doctor. Bring your Health Passport from the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, which contains your Doctor Visit Form. Your personal medical records should have:

- Your name, address and birth date
- Who to contact if there is an emergency
- A list of the medications you take and how much you take each day
- A list of any allergies you have, including allergies to medications
- A list of your medical conditions
- A list of your immunizations (the shots you've had to help you stay healthy)
- A list of any past illnesses or surgeries
- Any special instructions the doctor might need to know to take care of you.

Check to make sure all the information is up to date.

## Checklist

Just to review, here is a checklist of things you should do when preparing to see the doctor.

1. Have you made notes on why you are seeing the doctor?
2. Do the notes tell how long it has been going on and how often it happens?
3. Do the notes tell what makes it better or worse?
4. Have you listed any other things to mention to the doctor (for example, changes in your life or in your habits)?
5. Is your insurance card ready to take with you?
6. Is your personal medical history up to date and ready to take with you? (This should consist of your Health Passport from the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, which contains your Doctor Visit Form.)
7. When is your appointment?
8. Have you arranged transportation to and from the doctor's appointment?
9. What time will you have to leave to get to your appointment at least 15 minutes early? (Remember to allow time for traffic and parking.)
10. If your doctor asks you to make an appointment to see a specialist, do you have a letter of referral from your doctor?

## **At the doctor's appointment**

Always plan to get to the doctor's office at least 15 minutes before your appointment time. Be sure to bring your list or Health Passport with you. Let your doctor know why you made this appointment. During the visit, while the doctor is examining you, don't be afraid to ask questions. Or, take someone you trust with you if you need help because it is important to understand everything the doctor says, what tests are being done, whether you need to see another doctor or specialist, etc. Be sure you understand what the doctor needs you to do and why.

If the doctor prescribes new medicine, here are some questions to ask:

- What does this medicine treat?
- How will I know if it is working?
- What should I do if it does not seem to be working by the time you said it would?
- How long do I have to take the medicine?
- How much do I take each day, and when?
- The medicine should make me feel better; what should I do if I start to feel worse?



- What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?
- Do I need to be careful about what I eat and drink while I'm taking this medicine?
- Will this medicine make me feel better?
- If the medicine makes me feel different and I don't like the way it makes me feel, can we try another medicine?
- Is this medicine a pill or a liquid? Does it need to be refrigerated?

Keep in mind that you might need to see your doctor more often while you are taking certain medicines and that he or she may need to test your blood. In some cases, the doctor may need to run some other tests or have you see another doctor before he or she can figure out why you feel bad.

Before you leave your appointment, ask the doctor to write down everything he or she told you. Look at what he or she writes to make sure you understand it. If you need tests, ask the doctor when he or she will call you to go over the test results.





### **After your doctor's appointment**

After you get home from the doctor's appointment, read through what the doctor wrote down or listen to someone you trust as they read it to you. It is a good idea to talk to someone you trust about what happened at your doctor's appointment. Sometimes explaining something to someone else is the best way to make sure you understand it.

If your doctor asked you to take a new medicine, when you pick it up, ask the pharmacist to review with you any information about the dose, how often you should take it, what side effects it may have, how the medicine should be stored, and any instructions you need to follow (for example, some meds must be taken with meals).

While you are taking this new medicine, pay attention over the next few days to how you are feeling. You might want to jot down how you feel from day to day in a log or a journal. If you are not feeling better by the time the doctor said you would, or if you start to feel worse, call the doctor's office to see what you should do.

If you had tests run or you had to see a specialist, write the date you are supposed to hear back from your doctor on your calendar. If you do not hear from your doctor by that date, call the doctor's office to follow up.

## **Resources**

**Aging and Long Term Services** (State of New Mexico): 1-800-432-2050

**Center for Development and Disability** (University of New Mexico): 505-272-3000

**Cerebral Palsy Clinic** (University of New Mexico): 505-925-2350

**Continuum of Care** (University of New Mexico): 505-925-2350

**Developmental Disabilities Supports Division** (State of New Mexico): 505-476-8973

**Senior Affairs** (City of Albuquerque): 505-764-6400

**Transdisciplinary Evaluation and Support Clinic (TEASC)**(University of New Mexico): 505-272-5158



If you need more copies of this booklet,  
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